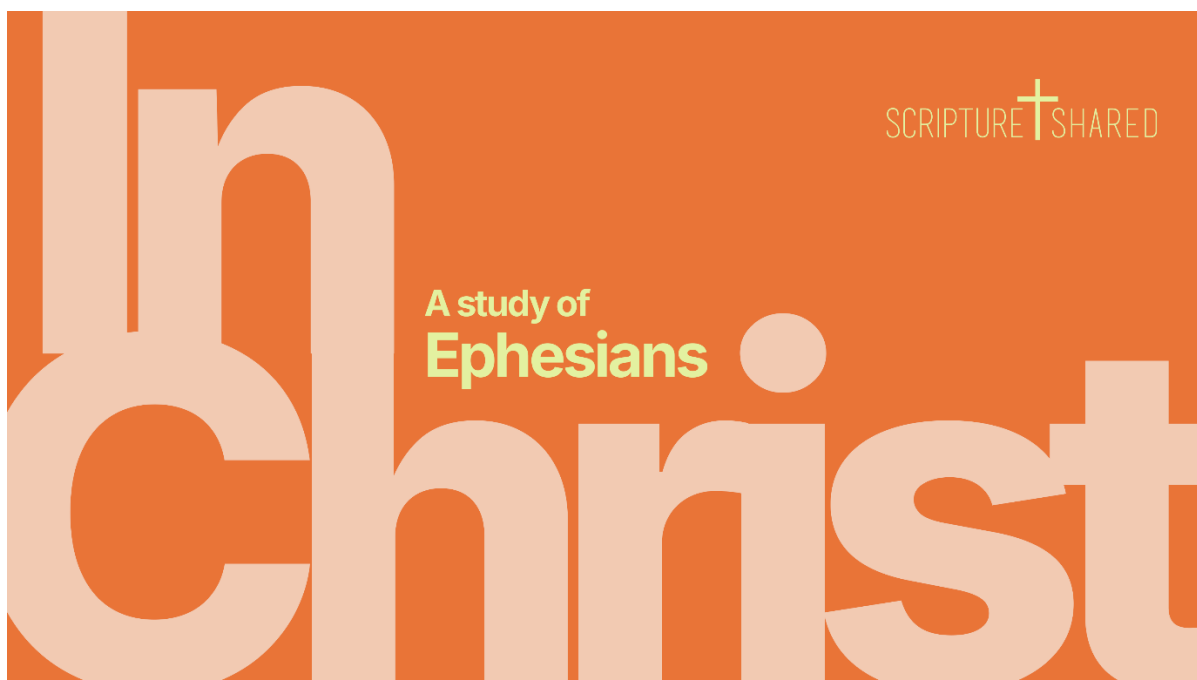




Week 1

Week 1, Day 1: Blessed

Ephesians 1:1-6

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Genesis 12:1-3

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

*² "I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;*

*I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.*

*³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."*

Understanding the Passage:

Paul begins this letter to the Christians at Ephesus and beyond by breathlessly proclaiming the ways God has blessed us. His perspective is zoomed out so far that we can see beyond the arc of human history and can take in God's intention and plan all along to claim us as God's own children. Paul doesn't want us to assume this zoomed-out perspective means that God is a distant observer, though. That's why he highlights the ways in which God is actively involved not only in the formulation but in the implementation of this plan of belonging. God "blessed", "God chose", God "destined", "God bestowed". The very sentence structure of these verses is clear—God is directly and deeply involved. Why? Because that's God's character and because we matter that much to God.

Notice also how Paul points to the expectations God has for us to respond to God's blessings: "to be holy and blameless before him in love." How is that possible? What does that look like? To what areas of our life does this expectation extend? We'll find guidance on these answers and how to live into them as we explore more of Ephesians. For now, Paul challenges us to a posture of readiness to act in response to the blessings we have received. We are not just #blessed, content with passively acknowledging the good things in our lives when convenient. Rather, we are blessed to be a blessing, embodying the God to whom we belong in every area of our lives.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. How important is belonging to you? What's a space to which you feel you genuinely belong?
2. What does being, "holy and blameless before [God] in love" mean to you? What is one area of your life in which you sense God nudging you to be more intentional about your growth toward holiness?

Week 1, Day 2: Way Maker

Ephesians 1:7-10

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Isaiah 43:16-21

*¹⁶Thus says the Lord,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
¹⁷who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down; they cannot rise;
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
¹⁸Do not remember the former things
or consider the things of old.
¹⁹I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert...
I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,*

²¹ *the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.*

Understanding the Passage:

Paul continues the letter's introduction by describing how God makes it possible for us to belong to God. For any of us wrestling with whether this is something we can do for ourselves or by ourselves, Paul introduces this phrase that will anchor and guide us throughout the letter: "in Christ". Paul wants to be abundantly clear—it's not us, it's Jesus who makes our belonging to God possible. He is our "Way Maker", to quote the Contemporary Christian song.

Christ is the one in whom "we have redemption", "forgiveness of our trespasses". Christ is the one who has "lavished on us" the "riches of his grace". Christ is the one who helps us understand the plans of God and to hold space for the mystery of God's work in the world. Christ is the one who gathers up time itself in an all-encompassing way and yet meets us right where we are in each moment. It is only because of Christ, through Christ, and in relationship with Christ that we come to belong to God. Thanks be to God who has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. May we embrace this grace to the core of our being, that it may change how we see, speak to and about, and relate with those we encounter in any space, including ourselves.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. How easy or difficult do you find it to internalize God's grace?
2. Paul refers here to the "mystery of God's will" as well as to God's "plan". As a general rule, do you appreciate mystery or plans more? How might God be inviting you to hold space for both in your journey of life and faith?

Week 1, Day 3: United in Purpose

Ephesians 1:11-14

¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Romans 12:1-2

¹⁻² So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out.

Understanding the Passage:

Paul writes as a Jewish Christian to an audience of primarily Gentile Christians. Pluralism is rampant in the culture and viewed as perfectly acceptable. Political pressures and economic disparities are constant realities from which there seems to be no end to or relief in sight. These first Christians Paul is writing to are trying to figure out what it looks like to be in community together and how to define and articulate the essentials of the faith.

In the midst of all this, Paul returns to his signature phrase “in Christ” to preview for us another theme in this letter: as followers of Jesus, we find our unity in holding onto the promised future (“our inheritance”) and by living into our present purpose (to/for “the praise of his glory”). Paul shares these two anchoring points to believers of diverse cultures, experiences, and perspectives on what matters most can agree on and be steadied by. What does that look like? Paul will offer a few suggestions in the following chapters of this letter, so let’s keep reading...

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What do you think Paul means by “inheritance”?
2. What does living “for the praise of God’s glory” look like, do you think?

Week 1, Day 4: The Power of Prayer

Ephesians 1:15-19

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

2 Kings 6:14-17

¹⁴ So one night the king of Aram sent a great army with many chariots and horses to surround the city. ¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up early the next morning and went outside, there were troops, horses, and chariots everywhere. “Oh, sir, what will we do now?” the young man cried to Elisha. ¹⁶ “Don’t be afraid!” Elisha told him. “For there are more on our side than on theirs!” ¹⁷ Then Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!” The Lord opened the young man’s eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire.

Understanding the Passage:

It is a powerful thing to know that someone has been praying for you, isn’t it? It’s even more powerful when you get to hear the specific prayers being offered. Here, Paul shares a sample of the content of his prayers for the young Christians in Ephesus. He prays they would be filled with wisdom, hope, and trust in the power of God.

Notice that Paul also offers some guidance for the Ephesians on the way they can expect these prayers to be answered—“as you come to know him”. Discipleship is a journey. The wisdom, hope, and trust God teaches us and inspires within us comes over time, as we engage in what pastor and author Eugene Peterson referred to as “a long obedience in the same direction”.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Is there someone whose prayers have made a difference in your life? Who might God be asking you to be more intentional in praying for?
2. How have you grown in your discipleship journey in the past six months? One year? Five years?

Week 1, Day 5: All in All

Ephesians 1:20-23

²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Revelation 1:4-18

"Grace and peace to you from the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come; from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne; ⁵ and from Jesus Christ. He is the faithful witness to these things, the first to rise from the dead, and the ruler of all the kings of the world.

All glory to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us.. ...¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave."

Understanding the Passage:

Sometimes the familiarity we have with Jesus, especially for those of us who grew up in the church, causes us to lose the sheer awe of his power above all, his presence in all, his promise of life forever to all who believe. In these verses, Paul brings us back to that awe. What a needed reminder it is, too—that no matter what hard season we are walking through, no matter what complicated situation we face, we can count on God's presence with us in it all and God's power to redeem it all in ways beyond our imagining.

These verses function as a liturgy, giving words to the praise we are inspired to offer to our God who is so worthy.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What is one ordinary moment you have sensed the presence of God filling it?
2. What inspires your awe of God? How do you sustain or come back to that awe? Does your awe of God inspire greater trust in God? Or does it keep God at a distance?

Video Discussion Questions:

1. How would you answer the opening question Amy asked: How often do you remember to thank God before eating a meal? (A) Always. Even snacks. And coffee. (B) Most of the time—unless I'm hangry. (C) Sometimes. I get distracted pretty easily. (D) Rarely
2. Try reading Ephesians 1:3-14 in one breath. See if you can make it further than Chris! Are you catching the enthusiastic spirit with which Paul is writing and sensing it yourself?
3. What are some intentional practices you engage in to help you continue to grow in your journey of faith?
4. What helps you hold onto hope rather than getting bogged down in cynicism, sarcasm, or despair when things are hard, heavy, or broken in the world?
5. When was the last time, or a time, you passionately engaged in worship? What were the circumstances that made that particular time of worship meaningful for you?
6. How do you prepare yourself for worship? What's one practice you could try out this week to be even more intentional about that preparation?

Prayer requests and other notes: